

News Release

For Immediate Release

Justice and Public Safety Ministers conclude productive meeting on key issues facing Canadians

February 24, 2022

Ottawa, Ontario

Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat

Today, federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) ministers ended two days of talks on justice and public safety priorities that are important to Canadians. Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, ministers held virtual meetings to continue to collaborate on shared priorities.

The federal Minister of Public Safety provided an update on the response to the blockades, occupations and other situations that have taken place across the country, as well as the recent invoking of a public order emergency by the Government of Canada under the *Emergencies Act*.

Ministers provided feedback on the decision to invoke the Act and, while some were supportive, others expressed their dissatisfaction and concern over the precedent it may have set.

Indigenous justice and policing

As part of ongoing reconciliation efforts, ministers discussed the upcoming engagement related to the Indigenous Justice Strategy as well as progress regarding the federal implementation of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, acknowledging the importance of respecting the jurisdiction of provinces and territories.

Ministers were also updated on activities related to Indigenous policing reforms and agreed to continue collaborating on their advancement, notably the stabilization and expansion of the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program (FNIPP), the co-development of federal-First Nations police services legislation, and the continued engagement with Inuit and Métis on their unique policing priorities.

Provinces and territories stressed the importance of continued engagement with regional Indigenous organizations, modern treaty signatories and other rights holders on issues that matter to their communities.

Several provincial and territorial ministers emphasized the need to prioritize the expansion of the FNIPP to ensure First Nations communities have access to effective policing services.

Firearms, guns and gangs

Ministers discussed their work to strengthen gun controls; target illegal firearms smuggling and trafficking; limit the supply of firearms to criminals; enhance investigative tools; and equip Canadians with more tools to prevent firearm-related gender-based violence and self-harm. Further, ministers reiterated the need to help keep cities and communities safe from gun violence.

At the request of provincial and territorial ministers, the federal government provided an update on its commitments to implement a mandatory buyback of banned assault-style weapons, and its intention to collaborate and provide financial support to provinces or territories that implement a ban on handguns.

Provincial and territorial ministers reiterated their call for renewal of the Guns and Gang Violence Action Fund to support the continuation and expansion of programs that combat gun and gang violence.

Future of the courts: modernizing, digitizing, and managing backlog

Federal, provincial and territorial ministers discussed respective efforts, initiatives and best practices in reducing backlogs and delays and making better use of technology and virtual court services, including the introduction of Bill S-4, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Identification of Criminals Act and to make related amendments to other Acts (COVID-19 response and other measures)*, which includes proposed reforms that were informed by previous FPT discussions.

Strengthening the family justice system and improving access to justice

COVID-19 has underscored the urgent need for the justice sector to improve its ability to collect data, conduct research, and rely on evidence to understand the state of justice in Canada, and people's ability to access it. Ministers agreed to consider how technology can improve or enhance the delivery of services to address family justice needs.

The ministers also agreed to elevate the importance of data and measurement in the areas of family and poverty law and they agreed to support transparency and accountability with regard to family and poverty law data by facilitating the public release, as soon as possible, of the "Measuring What Matters" report to improve access to justice data.

Ministers also discussed matters related to legal aid, including criminal legal aid, immigration and refugee legal aid, and progress on implementation of the Impact of Race and Culture Assessments, where they are being implemented. These assessments are pre-sentencing reports that help judges, when sentencing, to better understand the effect of poverty, marginalization, racism, and social exclusion on the offender and their life experience.

Ministers also recognized the continuing challenges and financial pressures that each jurisdiction faces in delivering legal aid services and which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. PT ministers asked for more federal funding for these services and agreed to continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic on their delivery. They also committed to collaborate to improve legal aid services.

Illicit Cannabis Sales and Medical Cannabis Program

Several jurisdictions expressed concerns about increased instances of abuse of the Cannabis for Medical Purposes Program in their communities, including the over-production and misuse of the personal and designated production program, over prescription by medical practitioners, impacts to law enforcement and community safety units, and links to organized crime. They also emphasized the need for the federal government to address these concerns, including reviewing the medical cannabis licensing process and increasing inspection and enforcement actions.

Ministers subsequently received an update on the work underway to address this abuse and its impacts. Ministers reiterated the need for focused efforts to address this issue and agreed to continue to carry out bilateral discussions, as needed.

Rural Crime

A way forward to finalize the Pan-Canadian Strategic Framework on Rural Crime was approved. This included agreement to take a phased approach for implementation, and to continue to engage federal departments, and interested provinces and territories on strategies to combat rural crime.

Combatting human trafficking

In light of it being the week where the country marked National Human Trafficking Awareness Day, ministers also discussed the importance of continuing to work together and across borders to address human trafficking, a crime that affects Canadians from all jurisdictions and that has a devastating impact on victims and their families.

Ministers discussed actions being taken to raise awareness of the issue, protect victims and intervene early, support survivors, and hold offenders accountable.

Other priority items

Ministers also discussed other important items, such as the need to prioritize the treatment of addictions through mechanisms such as diversion and drug treatment courts, as opposed to punishing non-violent offenders who suffer from addiction.

Ministers heard about innovative approaches to make the criminal justice system more responsive to the needs of those who are involved with it, such as specialized sexual violence courts and initiatives related to mental health. They committed to continue to share information in this regard.

Ministers discussed justice strategies to address the unprecedented rise in hate crime and hate-motivated offences in Canada, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Ministers were updated and then discussed how best to collaborate on the transfer of all cases of sexual assault and other criminal sexual offences under the *Criminal Code*, from military to civilian authorities.

Prior to their meeting, ministers engaged with representatives from the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and the Métis National Council. Discussions allowed participants to share their perspectives on several key issues: policing and community safety in Indigenous communities, the co-development of federal-First Nations police services legislation and collaboration towards a federal Indigenous Justice Strategy addressing systemic racism* and overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the justice system.

Quotes

“This meeting was yet another example that, with collaboration and coordination, we can make great strides together in areas that directly affect Canadians, such as access to justice, family justice and the modernization of courts across the country. I look forward to continuing to work with provincial and territorial counterparts to address important issues that matter to Canadians.”

The Honourable David Lametti

Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

“Collaboration between federal, provincial and territorial authorities is essential in ensuring the safety and security of Canadians. The input and perspectives shared over the course of the last two days will help shape and advance the Government of Canada’s initiatives, and I was glad to participate.”

The Honourable Marco Mendicino

Minister of Public Safety

“Keeping our neighbourhoods and communities safe is fundamental to providing an environment for people to thrive, grow and prosper across B.C. and the country. Working with our federal, provincial, and territorial colleagues on public safety challenges that affect us all is a top priority, and we welcomed the discussions this week. Through our collaborative efforts at all levels of government we are tackling important issues like gun and gang violence with a comprehensive approach that includes investments in prevention and community safety initiatives and meeting the policing needs of our communities. I look forward to our continued work.”

*The Honourable David Eby
Attorney General and Minister responsible for Housing*

“Our shared focus over the past two years has been to support each other during the COVID-19 pandemic and to improve and strengthen programs and services for people. I look forward to continuing to work across the country and locally to help our justice system become more responsive and sensitive to the needs and culture of Indigenous communities. This meeting has been an excellent opportunity to collaborate with our federal partners and counterparts across Canada to address our most pressing justice and public safety issues, and to work toward developing a brighter, post-pandemic future.”

*The Honourable Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General of British Columbia*

* Quebec shares with other governments the general objective of fighting racism and prejudice. In this respect, Quebec defines its directions and implements its own actions, including those made public through the Groupe d'action contre le racisme. Quebec rejects all forms of racism and is resolutely committed to fighting racism and prejudice in the province, exercising its full jurisdiction.

For more information, media may contact:

Media Relations
Department of Justice Canada
613-957-4207
media@justice.gc.ca

Media Relations Office
Public Safety Canada
(613) 991-0657
ps.mediarelations-relationsaveclesmedias.sp@canada.ca